

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex Block

Island NWR □ John H. Chafee NWR at Pettaquamscutt Cove □ Ninigret NWR □ Sachuest Point NWR □ Trustom Pond NWR



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March 15, 2004

For Immediate Release:

Revised Dog Policy for the Rhode Island National Wildlife Complex Becomes Effective This Spring

Responding to concerns for public safety, conflicts between visitor uses, and the need to enhance protection of wildlife resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that beginning April 4, 2004, dogs would no longer be allowed at Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “We are implementing the requirements of our Comprehensive Conservation Plans for these refuges, which call for the elimination of dog walking within our refuges” Charlie Vandemoer, Refuge Manager of the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex said.

Unlike State and Town Parks, National Wildlife Refuges are set aside specifically for wildlife. “Our management of the refuges, by law, is to foster wildlife conservation first and foremost” said Charlie Vandemoer. “While we welcome the public to enjoy the refuges, we must insure that our visitor uses are compatible with our overarching mandate to put wildlife first”. All of the Rhode Island refuges were established with purposes related to protecting, managing, and conserving native wildlife.

Implementation of the dog policy will primarily effect the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge(NWR) in Charlestown and the Sachuest Point NWR in Middletown. The John H. Chafee NWR in Narragansett and the Trustom Pond NWR in South Kingstown already have a no dog policy in effect. Implementation of a dog policy on the Block Island Refuge will be addressed in an interagency Public Use Plan called for in that Refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

The decision and reasons to eliminate dog walking on Rhode Island’s National Wildlife Refuges were outlined in the Comprehensive Conservation Plans written for each refuge and approved in May of 2002. During development of the plans, public hearings, formal public comment periods, and public workshops were held to solicit public input. After reviewing all of the public comments that were received, the current and projected recreational use of the refuges was evaluated along with the need to provide for public safety and wildlife resource protection. The final plan mandates curtailment of dog walking by 2005.

Several reasons prompted the elimination of this activity on the Rhode Island Refuges:

- *Dogs can intimidate other refuge visitors, and deprive them of the peace that refuges provide. Visitation to the National Wildlife Refuges is expanding, potentially aggravating user conflicts;*
- *Dog feces left on trails are an unhealthy and unsightly nuisance to refuge visitors. The presence of dog feces on public trails is one of the most common complaints we hear;*
- *Dogs, whether leashed or unleashed, conflict with refuge efforts to provide recreational opportunities for a diversity of visitors, including those limited to handicapped accessible trails, and the many school groups which visit the refuges for environmental education;*
- *Complaints regarding dogs either harassing people or showing aggressive behavior towards*

them are received on a regular basis;

- *Dog walking has resulted in user conflicts with persons engaged in priority public uses (bird watching, photography, see below);*
- *Instinctively, dogs want to chase wildlife. Unleashed dogs commonly chase nesting wildlife, which can result in destruction of ground nests and young. Dogs may step on nests or young chicks, as they “freeze” in response to danger;*
- *Wildlife can’t distinguish between dogs on leashes and unleashed dogs. In the presence of a dog, many species will abandon their nests or young, leaving them vulnerable to be killed by predators, or die from starvation or exposure.*

During the planning process, the Service considered allowing dogs on leash only. But despite the many dog owners who responsibly keep pets leashed, there are many who do not. Our staff and volunteers estimate that between 25% - 40% of the people walking their dogs do not keep them on a leash.

“I understand the desire of some to walk their dogs, however, we must hold the safety of refuge visitors, protection of wildlife from harassment, and the quality of visitor experiences in mind” said Sharon Ware, Deputy Refuge Manager at the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge. “Regrettably, there are several incidences each year of visitors being injured or seriously frightened by dogs, both leashed and unleashed, at the refuges. Some visitors are even going so far as carrying a large stick or bat with them on the trail because of a bad past experience”.

Devoting additional staff resources to monitor the leash law at Sachuest Point and Ninigret Refuges would detract from our ability to provide high quality “priority public uses” across the Complex. These priority uses, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, interpretation, hunting and fishing, were identified in the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act as the priorities for receiving enhanced consideration on National Wildlife Refuges. Dog walking is not one of the six priority uses, nor are dogs (except seeing or hearing dogs) necessary to support the safe, practical, and effective conduct of the priority public use programs we would be implementing on refuges.

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ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

DOG POLICY

April 4, 2004



Effective April 4, 2004, consistent with the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plans, dogs will no longer be permitted on Refuge lands. Presented below are answers to some frequently asked questions that have been raised regarding this policy.

Why are dogs no longer allowed?

The Fish and Wildlife Service evaluated whether continued dog walking on National Wildlife Refuges was compatible with public safety and wildlife resource conservation in our recently completed Comprehensive Conservation Plans. We found that continuing to allow dog walking on National Wildlife Refuge lands was not advisable because:

- *Such use has, and would continue to, compromise public safety;*
- *Such use is likely to continue to result in conflicts with other Refuge Visitors;*
- *Such use poses a threat of harassment, disturbance, and harm to wildlife resources, which the Service is mandated by federal law to manage for - - first and foremost.*

National Wildlife Refuges are established and managed, by law, to insure that wildlife conservation and protection comes first. Today, individuals of over 250 species of birds, 40 species of mammals, and 20 amphibian & reptile species depend on the Rhode Island refuges for survival.

National Wildlife Refuges are also places for people. We encourage visitors to come and enjoy the natural environment through nature walks, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, fishing, and hunting. These are the priority public uses we will continue to manage for. There is special focus on these activities because they help foster an appreciation and understanding of wildlife and the outdoors. The number of visitors to our refuges is rapidly expanding. The Conservation Plans find that allowing dogs on the refuge conflict with these priority public uses.

Has the public had an Opportunity to Comment on this Action?

Yes. The public was invited on several occasions to provide comment regarding this and all other public uses, including how we should manage wildlife refuges during development of the Comprehensive Conservation Plans for each Refuge. These Conservation Plans were finalized in May of 2002.

Public workshops were developed, public hearings held, formal public comment periods were opened, and a draft of Comprehensive Conservation Plan were distributed to solicit public input on management of the refuges. The Service distributed responses to the many public comments we received. Based on public input and Fish and Wildlife review of this issue, the Comprehensive Conservation Plans call for elimination of dog walking on the National Wildlife

Refuges by 2005. For more information, you may request a copy of the Comprehensive Conservation plans from our office, or obtain them on the web at http://library.fws.gov/CMP/index_cmps.htm.

Why aren't dogs compatible with the mission of putting wildlife first on the Rhode Island Refuges?

- *Dogs can intimidate other refuge visitors, and deprive them of the peace that refuges provide. Visitation to the National Wildlife Refuges is expanding, potentially aggravating user conflicts;*
- *Dog feces left on trails are an unhealthy and unsightly nuisance to refuge visitors. The presence of dog feces on public trails is one of the most common complaints we hear;*
- *Dogs, whether leashed or unleashed, conflict with Refuge efforts to provide recreational opportunities for a diversity of visitors, including those limited to handicapped accessible trails, and the many school groups which visit the refuges for environmental education;*
- *Complaints regarding dogs either harassing people or showing aggressive behavior towards them are received on a regular basis;*
- *Dog walking has resulted in user conflicts with persons engaged in priority public uses (bird watching, photography, etc.);*
- *Instinctively, dogs want to chase wildlife. Unleashed dogs commonly chase nesting wildlife, which can result in destruction of ground nests and young. Dogs may step on nests or young chicks, as they "freeze" in response to danger;*
- *Wildlife can't distinguish between dogs on leashes or unleashed dogs. Many will leave their nests or young, leaving them vulnerable to be killed by predators, or a long separation can result in death;*
- *Even a very tame dog can cause alarm or fear in wildlife;*
- *Resources needed to manage dog use detract from our ability to focus efforts on providing high quality wildlife-dependent priority use programs;*

Did you consider allowing dogs on leash?

Yes. Despite the many dog owners who responsibly keep pets leashed, there are many who do not. Our staff and volunteers estimate that as many as 25% to 40% of the persons walking their dogs do not keep them on a leash.

Wildlife do not differentiate between dogs on or off a leash. Dog walking is not a priority public use on National Wildlife Refuges, and interferes with or detracts from the mandated purpose of the refuge in putting wildlife conservation first.

Why are you implementing this policy now?

Our Comprehensive Conservation Plan mandates us to eliminate dog walking by 2005. We are implementing this policy now because of the upcoming nesting season for ground nesting birds, and to have the policy in place for the upcoming spring and summer seasons.

Where can I take my dog for a walk?

We acknowledge the public's desire to walk their dogs in a natural setting, and fortunately there are many areas outside the refuge where dog walking is more appropriate. In fact, there are more miles of trail open for dog walking than are being closed on the refuges. We have listed public areas near our refuges on another handout to help you find other areas where dog walking is allowed. Please ask for a copy. ***CHECK WITH THE LANDOWNER FOR CURRENT REGULATIONS REGARDING THE USE OF DOGS IN THESE AREAS.***

If you have additional questions, please contact us directly:

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Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge
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Public Dog-walking Areas Near the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge



Town of Charlestown

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Ninigret Town Park (owner required to clean up after pet; 364-1200 or 364-1222)

Leashed dogs allowed seasonally -

- Charlestown Town Beach (Labor Day–Memorial Day; 364-1200 or 364-1222)
- Charlestown Breachway (October 1–March 31; 364-7000 or 322-8910)
- East Beach/Ninigret Conservation Area (November 1–March 31; 322-0450 or 322-8910)
- Burlingame State Park (November 1–April 14; 8 miles of hiking trails, access is off Rt. 1 South; 322-8910)

PLEASE NOTE - Dogs are **not allowed** at any time at nearby Kimball Wildlife Sanctuary owned by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island

Town of South Kingstown

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- South County Bike Path (5 miles, from Kingston Train Station to Peace Dale; 789-9301)
- Tuckertown Town Park (owner required to clean up after pet; 789-9331)
- Great Swamp Wildlife Management Area (10 mile trail system, access is off Rt.138 and Liberty Lane; 789-0281)

Leashed dogs allowed seasonally -

- South Kingstown Town Beach at Matunuck (October 1 – April 30; 789-9331)
- East Matunuck State Beach (October 1–March 31; 789-8585 or 789-8374)

Town of Richmond

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Carolina Wildlife Management Area (10 mile trail system, main access is on Pine Hill Road; 789-0281)

Town of Westerly

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

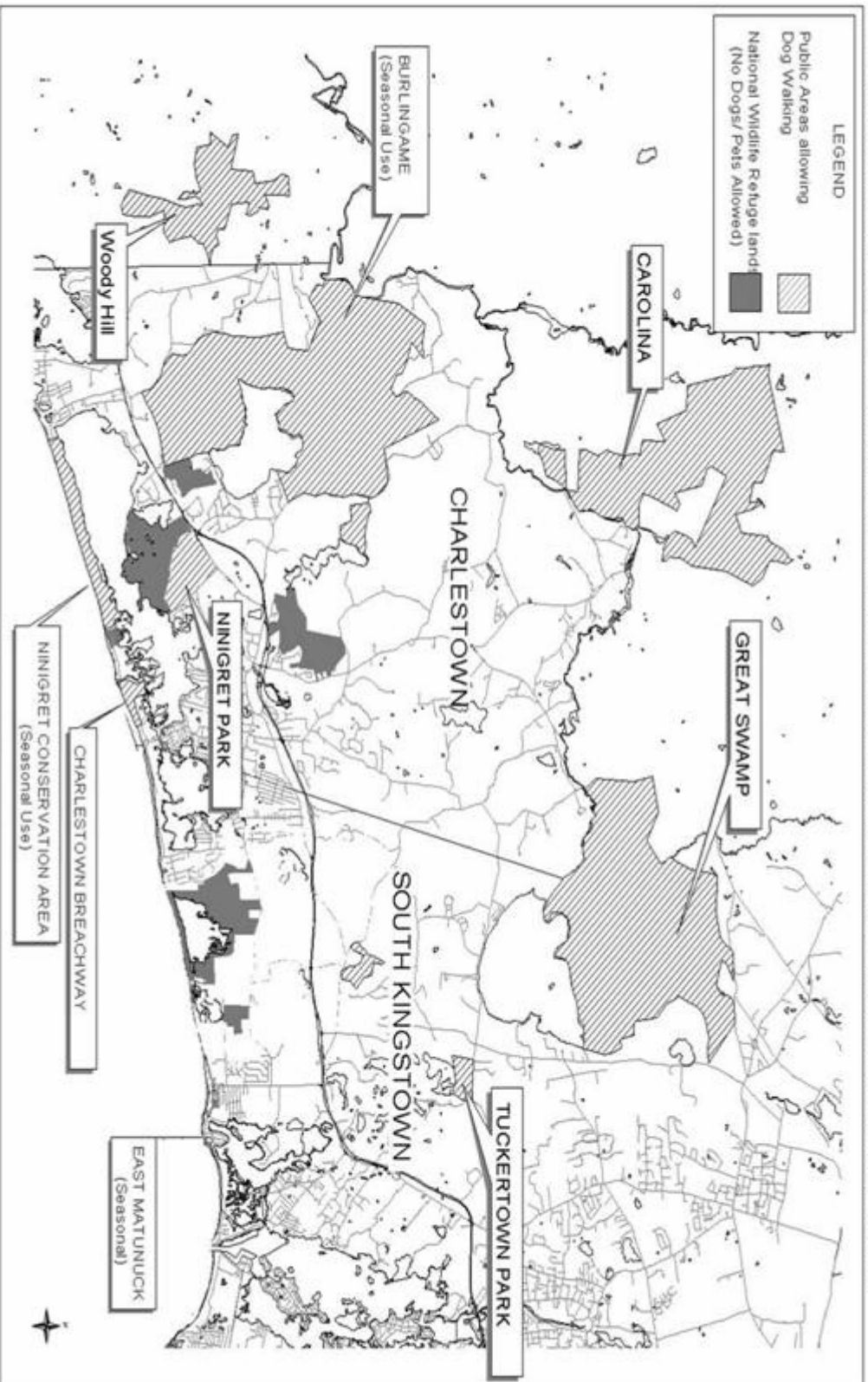
- Woody Hill Wildlife Management Area (2 mile trail system, access can be gained along Woody Hill Road; 789-0281)

Leashed dogs allowed seasonally -

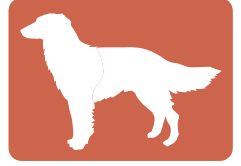
- Misquamicut State Beach (October 1–March 31; 596-9097 or 322-8910)

MAP on REVERSE >>>>>>>

Public Areas Allowing Dog-walking Near the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. Check for Latest Regulations.



**Public Dog-walking Areas
Near the
Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge**



Town of Middletown

Leashed dogs allowed Labor Day to Memorial Day -

- Town-owned portions of Second and Third Beaches (owner is required to clean up after pet; 849-2822 or 846-2119)

Leashed dogs allowed from Memorial Day to Labor Day ONLY between the hours of 5am and 7:45am -

- Town-owned portions of Second and Third Beaches (owner is required to clean up after pet; 849-2822 or 846-2119)

PLEASE NOTE - Dogs are **not allowed** at any time at nearby Norman Bird Sanctuary on Third Beach Road

Town of Newport

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Cliff Walk (846-9600 or 845-9123; 3.5 miles, owner is required to clean up after pet;)
- Brenton Point State Park (849-4562 or 847-2400; shoreline access and trails)
- Fort Adams State Park (847-2400; shoreline access and trails)
- Newport Dog Park (846-9600 or 845-9123; located on Connell Highway)
- Miantonomi Memorial Park (846-9600 or 845-9123; owner is required to clean up after pet)

Leashed dogs allowed seasonally -

- Easton's Beach/First Beach (Labor Day - Memorial Day; 848-6491)

Town of Portsmouth

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Melville Pond Nature Reserve (683-3255; 4 miles of hiking trails)

Town of Jamestown

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Beavertail State Park (423-9941 or 884-2010; 153 acres with shoreline access and hiking trails)

Town of Bristol

Leashed dogs allowed year-round -

- Colt State Park (253-7482; 464 acres with shoreline access and several miles of hiking trails and bike paths)

MAP on REVERSE >>>>>>>

Public Areas Allowing Dog Walking Near the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge.
Check with landowners for the latest regulations

